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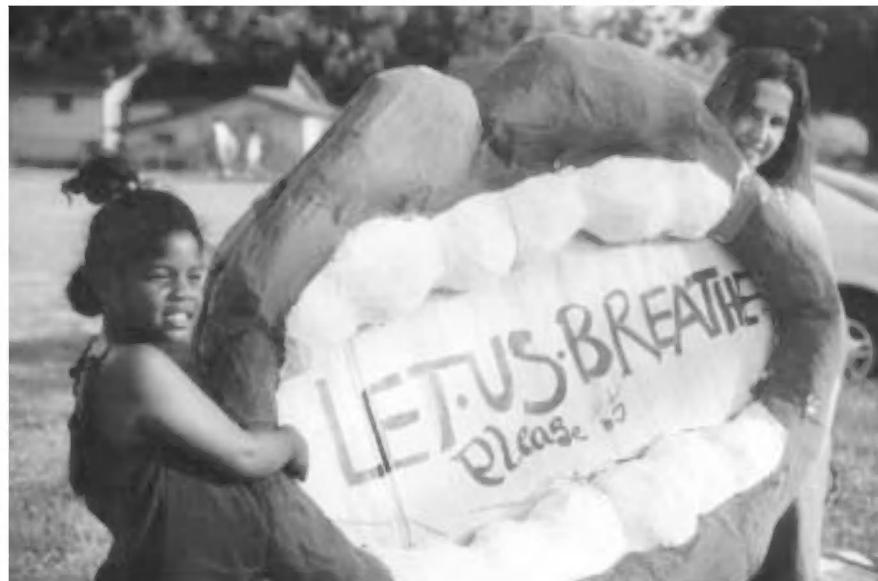
Community Journal

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A River Story Communities Fighting for Environmental Justice



A RIVER STORY

Communities Fighting for Environmental Justice

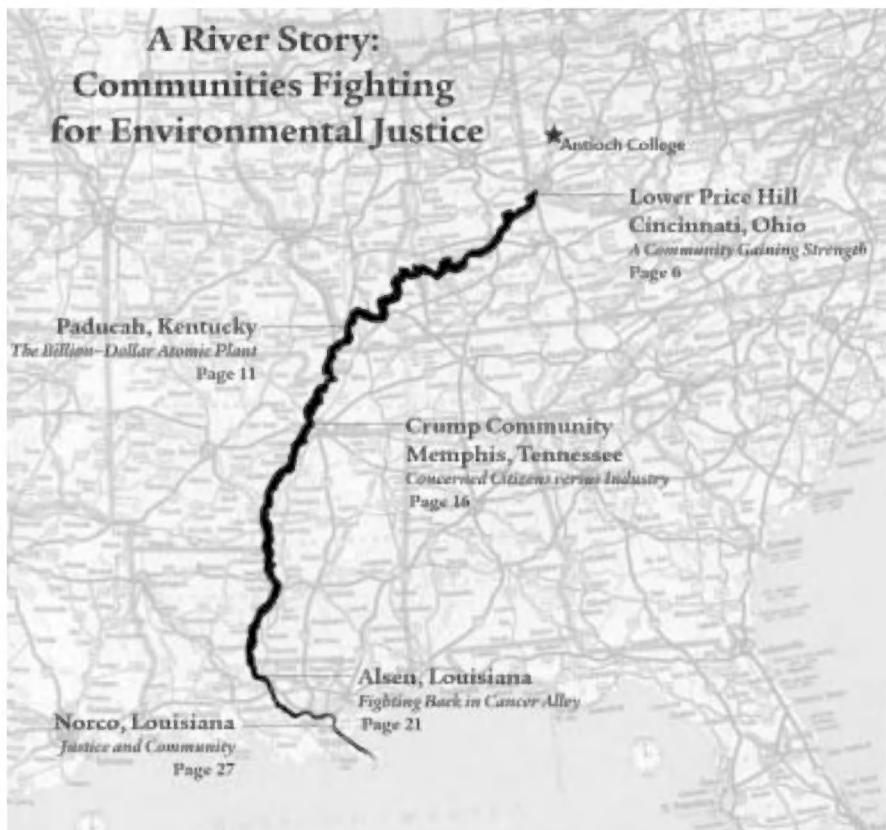
Created by the members of the
Antioch College Environmental Field Program
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A RIVER STORY

BY AMBER PLEASANT & ANNA JOHANSON

A River Story was born in the community-building work of the Antioch College Environmental Field Program in the summer of 2001. Its focus was on environmental justice. Ten of us—the two of us recent Antioch graduates, the others current Antioch students—traveled together down the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, visiting communities that have been devastated by environmental destruction. People of these communities are fighting brave grassroots battles to save their lives, their health, their land, and their water, their sense of place and their sense of justice.

We wanted to be with them, in their communities. We wanted to share their struggle, and bear witness to it.

We are grateful they welcomed us. They offered us honest talk, hot meals, warm beds, traveling prayers, and inspiration. They told us their stories. We listened. Student activists and grassroots organizers, together, gathered the courage and strength to trust each other, to listen, and to share.

These words, the telling of these stories, created bridges across the souls of folks young, old, tired, and new, wizened and searching. Their stories preserve history, record the present, and reveal the strength that will carry us into the future. To hear them told, to be in the living presence of these stories, has given us insight into the ongoing struggle for economic and environmental justice, and has renewed our faith in the healing power of humanity.

Our journey began at the river. We stood together in a circle, hands held, on the shore of the Little Miami, less than a mile from our Antioch home, offering up our wishes for the summer to come. We each brought with us a piece of something—a leaf, a flower—and tossed it into the river, so we would always remember that leaf, that flower flowing down the Little Miami into the Ohio and on to the Mississippi and out into the Gulf of Mexico.

We were connected by this to the work we would do, and the reason and purpose for doing it. The rivers took us to the people in each of the communities we visited; and as our leaves, our flowers made their way down the rivers, so did our waste and pollution, our chemical toxins, run-off from our fields, discharge from industries and towns and cities. . . .

Everyone we met was downstream from our home. We were connected to them, and they were connected to us, by these rivers that are the veins of this land, this water that gives life to us all.

We could not be disconnected. We could not lose our sense of place.

In Cincinnati we discovered true community in the neighborhood of Lower Price Hill, an urban Appalachian enclave energized and organized to fight the corporations polluting their environment. The young people of Lower Price Hill were especially important in the movement for environmental justice, energized by their strong bonding to Appalachian culture and their close

connections to the adults of the community.

In Paducah, Kentucky we found a community deeply hurt in many ways—emotionally and psychologically as well as physically—by the deadly radioactive poisoning of their environment by the government's nuclear energy technology. Devastated by rampant death and disease, the people of Paducah are fighting bravely to save their land, despite a painful sense of betrayal as well as feelings of suffering and loss. At Paducah we learned to listen to stories of truth and wisdom.

At Memphis, in the Crump Community, we learned the power of faith and leadership, and—again—the power of community, for the people of Crump were powerfully united in their fight for environmental justice. Leaders such as Balinda Moore and Diane Ivey tap the deep roots of the community, inspiring everyone to get involved in lively activities that strengthened solidarity among the people.

In the community of Alsen, Louisiana, we learned the power of perseverance and hope. There we entered the notorious “Cancer Alley” region of the lower Mississippi. The people of Alsen have been fighting powerfully destructive enemies for a long, long time; they know they will be fighting for environmental justice for a long time to come. They have won some small victories; courageously they keep the slow burning flame of hope alive.

At Norco, Louisiana, in the shadow of Shell, we learned the great power of the future. Our teachers

were the children of Norco, with their great youthful wisdom and all-embracing love, despite the vast oppression of environmental destruction literally next door to their homes. We made lasting connections with these courageous young people; we will stay connected with them.

As we moved through Ohio and Kentucky, from Memphis to the Delta and down into Louisiana, the communities we found, the heartfelt connections we made with people and the passion for justice they shared, deepened our feelings. We felt angered and sickened by the injustices we saw.

We began to perceive and experience a complex tangle of oppression—economic, political, social, environmental—that targets people of color, women, and the poor. The history of oppression committed against each of these groups continues to be repeated. As we began to recognize the patterns of oppression and the ways that people and communities organize for change, we began to understand the ways that we affect and are affected by the workings of these systems.

All of these interactions contributed to our deepening sense of place. We began to understand some of the intricate patterns inherent in the social and environmental history of the land and the rivers that bind all of these people together. We began to understand our connection to it all.

The people in the communities we visited led us through their neighborhoods, and freely welcomed us into their lives. They became our teachers, and a vital part of learning from them was in working shoulder to shoulder with them in their communities. We worked on community clean-up projects; we surveyed community health and community awareness of environmental justice issues; we facilitated workshop dialogue on racism and



economic oppression; we participated in rallies and EPA hearings on the Clean Air Act; we created huge puppets and parade banners for community expression of the themes of environmental justice.

The people gave us so much of their time and energy that we sought ways to learn from them without interrupting them and getting in their way. We asked them how we could contribute to the work. We learned they felt a need to share their stories. They wanted to document the cherished history of their communities, and tell of the devastation of their lands.

And so our role in these communities has been to listen, and to write down these stories, and to give them back to the people who told them. And now we are passing them on, via these pages, with the hope of honoring the many ways we have seen people and communities gain strength and inspiration in their brave work to heal their places on the earth.

It was not an easy journey, ten of us traveling together in two vans through the long hot summer of the South, cooking on camp stoves, sleeping in tents. Many times we got sick, exhausted, overwhelmed. We struggled to communicate with each other, to understand and be compassionate. It was not easy; but our difficulties were nothing compared to those of the people we met along the way. The strength of their voices and their stories kept us going.

And keeps us going still. This is only the beginning. Our trip may be over, but these stories continue, their voices are still heard, and the struggle goes on. It goes on right here at home. We have returned to Yellow Springs only to look around us and realize there is so much to attend to in our own community. There is groundwater contamination by industrial pollutants, there is an epidemic of environmental illnesses, there is an entrenched power structure resistant to change. . . .

Yellow Springs is not in “cancer alley”; it is a well-to-do, progressive, college-based community—and yet the patterns of injustice and oppression continue even here, and the connections between our environment and our health are clear. Environmental justice is not a distant concern, no matter where you live. Wherever there are people living next to industry, there are injustices being committed.

We cannot choose to ignore this. Look at where you live: where does your waste go? where does your water come from? who lives across the fence from the industrial plant? what is upstream and who lives downstream from your community?

We are all a part of it all. “We all live downstream.” Through the products we choose to buy, through the gasoline that fuels our cars, or through the cancer in our children and our partners, we are all involved. We are all responsible to recognize environmental injustice, and to work for justice.



Lower Price Hill, Cincinnati

A Community Gaining Strength

Lower Price Hill is a small neighborhood community in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is situated at the bottom of Price Hill at the place where the Mill Creek and the Ohio River meet. The people in Lower Price Hill have built a tight community, based around their Appalachian heritage. It is a place where children are cared for no matter whose they are, and people share their lives with each other.

People speak often of the Great Migration, which began in the 1930s and continues to a small degree today. People living in the Appalachian Mountains moved into cities in search of jobs. Many Appalachians settled in Cincinnati. They chose Lower Price Hill because jobs in industry were close enough to walk to. Men often arrived in the city first, finding work and settling in before bringing their wives and children from the mountains to live with them. There are stories still about families housing male relatives or friends until they

could get on their feet. It is a strong part of Appalachian culture to look out for each other.

Urban Appalachians have a history of community activism, which is based around this sense of responsibility for each other. The activism for environmental justice in Lower Price Hill is based on this. Many projects have begun by people talking with each other about the problems they were facing and deciding to do something about it.

As a people they have not had much help from the outside, and for a long time they have been fighting discrimination in many different forms. The media has misrepresented Lower Price Hill only as an industrial waste site and a place of crime and racial discrimination. This is a stunted, outside view of what this community stands for.

Urban Appalachians are affected by the stereotypes that are placed upon them by society. This discrimination has affected them economi-

cally, environmentally, socially and politically. Something that makes the Lower Price Hill neighborhood unique is the way people have banded together to fight against these problems and take back their voice as a community.

People moved to Lower Price Hill for jobs and the only ones that were available to them were in industry. Many of the companies used massive amounts of toxic chemicals, which at that time were not recognized as health risks. Employment opportunities have not increased, leaving people with the choice between jobs or their health. There is little interest on the part of the local government to bring new development opportunities into the community.

Housing is also an issue. The buildings are owned by people outside the community, so everyone is forced to rent without option to buy. People end up paying rent their whole lives. This perpetuates dependence on



outside institutions, and sucks money out of the community. Since public schools are funded off the tax base, the schools in Lower Price Hill do not have the funding necessary to meet the needs of the children. Most of the Appalachian kids in the neighborhood do not graduate from high school. Many of the frustrations students have are a product of the discrimination they have faced. Doctors refuse to make the connection between environmental pollution and children's health and development. For example, the community is told that the reason there is such a high number of kids in the neighborhood with learning disabilities is that they are inbred, not that it is a product of industrial pollution. This comes from the same doctors who say that the women in the neighborhood get cancer because they have sex too young. Clearly these doctors are misrepresenting the facts and giving in to prejudiced stereotypes.

Youth programs have been created to counteract this destructive discrimination, instilling in the young people a pride in their Urban Appalachian culture as well as experience in community activism. The youth programs in Lower Price Hill today are West-C, Youth Environmental Program, and Save The Children. They work together and with other programs such as the Urban Appalachian Council. These three programs

hire local kids, giving them paying jobs to be active in their community. They clean up the streets, put on plays, make videos, paint murals, do photography, publish a newsletter, and do other community based activities. The community video project by the kids at West-C is an excellent example of their activism. In the video they show Lower Price Hill as they see it, talking about landmarks that are important to them, showing the community as a vibrant, energetic, loving place to live. They also address racism, the environment, alcohol, and what it means to be Urban Appalachian.

The community did a health survey by asking half the families, selected at random, about their children's health. They found high rates of asthma, ear and throat infections, lead poisoning, as well as learning and developmental problems. There was a one hundred percent response from the community, due partly to the fact that the community had full control over the health survey. Their next project is to do a women's health survey. The Urban Appalachian Council is also creating workshops for parents and children to learn more about health issues, including unusually high rates of cancer.

Lower Price Hill is like a pocket for the contaminated air of the nearby industries. Mill Creek—now an

industrial sewer—runs through Lower Price Hill into the Ohio River. There is no relief from pollution; industries go basically unchecked by the government. So the community has taken it upon itself to make the industries accountable. There was once a paint industry down the street that polluted heavily; the community brought it to the attention of government agencies, the company was unable to pay the fines and left. That was a great victory. People will tell you that the smell from Queen City Barrel, a barrel cleaning and recycling facility, used to be much worse. The improvement is because of the constant policing by the people of Lower Price Hill. Now instead of constant pollution, the company is only allowed to pollute for six minutes every hour. This is a big improvement, but it is still not good enough.

One of the stories people tell is about the Towers incident involving a factory that moved out, leaving behind a Superfund site. The city tried to get the community to pay for the cleanup and demolition, but the community raised their voices in opposition, and the city had to pay. No one expected the community to be such a strong force. People refer to it as an environmental disaster but also as a community victory. Lower Price Hill is gaining strength and unity.



JANE INGLE

My Story Is Right Here

I'm from a family of twelve, and I was the baby. I've lived in Lower Price Hill all my life. My roots have always been here, and this is where I'll stay. I like the people down here.

When I grew up your neighbors watched out for your kids. My family is still here; a lot of families are still here. We still watch out for each other's kids. I love the little hometown feeling—the closeness. I think it's safe here. The neighbors know us. Our community is safe. There are bad things here but there are bad things everywhere. The neighborhood has got a bad reputation but if you come here you'll see it's not that bad. If you live here, it's all right.

My mom was into activism; she was in the mothers' club. When I was small I knew something was going on. I live in pollution. I grew up in pollution. But when I was young I didn't know you could do anything about it. A lot of my friends were sick. Lower Price Hill is the melting pot of all factories. We sit so low to the river, all the pollution stays where it's at—right here. We fought to get it cleaned up. The community has done a lot about the pollution. Poor people can do a lot if they stick together.

My work? We were trying to educate people about pollution. We

interviewed people, asking them about asthma, about their health. How many kids on Ritalin? How many have bad ears? How many people's kids was sick? A whole bunch was sick. From the survey we found out a lot of information about what pollution does to people. Once you find out what they're burning you can find out what it's doing to you. We got an Appalachian spirit award for cleaning up the environment. It's really an honor to get that. They gave it to the whole group.

The kids can breathe better now. As far as pollution, the kids know the pollution ain't over yet. They know because they live down here. I'd like my kids to forget it all. I'd like them to remember the old days, the closeness. You could ask your neighbor for a cup of sugar. A lot of people aren't proud to be Appalachian, but we are. We got deep Appalachian roots.

I got five healthy kids. My mom is still living. She's 77. We've been pretty fortunate, our family. I got a dirt yard. I got cats and dogs. We're pretty lucky; we still have a lot of friends here. Can't ask for more. Each year my son Joel grows good tomatoes, he's gonna be our farmer. My story is right here in the dirt, these kids.

JUNE RAINES

We Took Charge

I never made the connection between my always getting sick and the environment. They never told us anything about it. I mean, the smells from the plants closed down the clinics because the doctors and nurses were getting sick—but they never told us anything.

When I was a child, I remember playing on the barrels at Queen City Barrel. They told everyone that the barrels just had tomato soup in them. One time, we took some folks who we were trying to get a grant from on a tour of Queen City Barrel. The people there opened one of their "tomato soup" barrels and inside it was this smelly purple toxic sludge! Everyone got out of there so fast!

I mean, probably some of the barrels do have tomato soup in them, but not that one!

I knew they dumped those barrels into the sewer when it rains. I used to say it all the time when I was a child but no one believed me. Then one day, we were sitting out and we saw them doing it. Told ya! I knew they were doing it for years! We ran to get a camera, but they had seen us and were just shutting the gate as we got back.

I worked a lot on the Lower Price Hill children's health survey. It got its start through the laundromat gossip during the Towers incident. The Towers had been there, across the street from the school, all my life. We never knew what was inside them. They were just what was left from an old plant that had moved out.

Then there was a plan to tear them down and put a parking lot there. They said nothing was wrong, but when the construction company came and tested it, they said no, they wouldn't tear it down—so obviously

something was wrong.

So they found a company that deals with contaminated sites, and they set up a plan to tear the Towers down. They promised the community council that there would be no toxins and no fire. We called the fire department and they said it wouldn't burn.

Well, they covered the Towers with a huge canvas thing, so we couldn't see what they were doing in there. The Towers caught on fire, and all of these firemen in moon suits came in to deal with it—and they didn't say anything to us. My kid was playing football in the street, right there, and no one told us anything. There was mercury, arsenic, all kinds of poisons.

They still keep it hush-hush. At the meeting with the company and the city, they tried to make the community pay for the cleanup, but we took charge of that meeting and won. It was about three years ago that the Towers burned, and since then we've done the children's health survey and we're planning a women's health survey.

The children's health survey was a good thing for us. I'm the reason there was a 100 percent response! I went up and down the street knocking on doors until everyone had done it. One lady was really hard, I must have knocked on her door ninety times and each time it was "no, I'm busy . . ." Well, eventually I convinced her.

I know someone who worked at Queen City Barrel and he got fired pretty soon after he refused to go wading around in a bunch of toxic stuff. Queen City says they won't hire people from Lower Price Hill because they can't pass the drug tests, but really they lose the jobs because they won't wade around in toxics. It's true! If you look at the workers inside, you can see that they're all disfigured and discolored. You know, from the tomato soup!

WENDY PRESTON

I Have Everything I Need

We've always lived in Lower Price Hill. Mama had me when she was 16.

Grandma's been here forever. Been here for about 40 years. She was a little mean, but she was only trying to teach us. When we were little she'd chase us down the hall, yelling "Go to bed!" It was funny, she'd yell at me and my sister Karen. Karen is the second oldest, then we got two little ones. Because I'm the oldest, I gotta take care of them most of the time. I don't mind, Momma needs me to.

Working gives me something to do. The YEP (Youth Environmental Program) is all right. Most of the other people who work here go to my school. It's good because I get some spending money. And that's *my* money. I can do whatever I want with it, buy whatever I want with it, because I worked for this.

We should try to work together but the boys here got an attitude problem. All the boys are lazy. They don't want to do nothing but complain. They have to understand that no one wants to do it, it just has to be done. They're wasting time by complaining. If you work together it gets done faster.

Donna gave us a choice. We can stay and work or else we have to leave. We work trying to better the community. Sometimes we sweep the streets or paint. Donna tries to group you with people who get along. The biggest responsibility is working together.

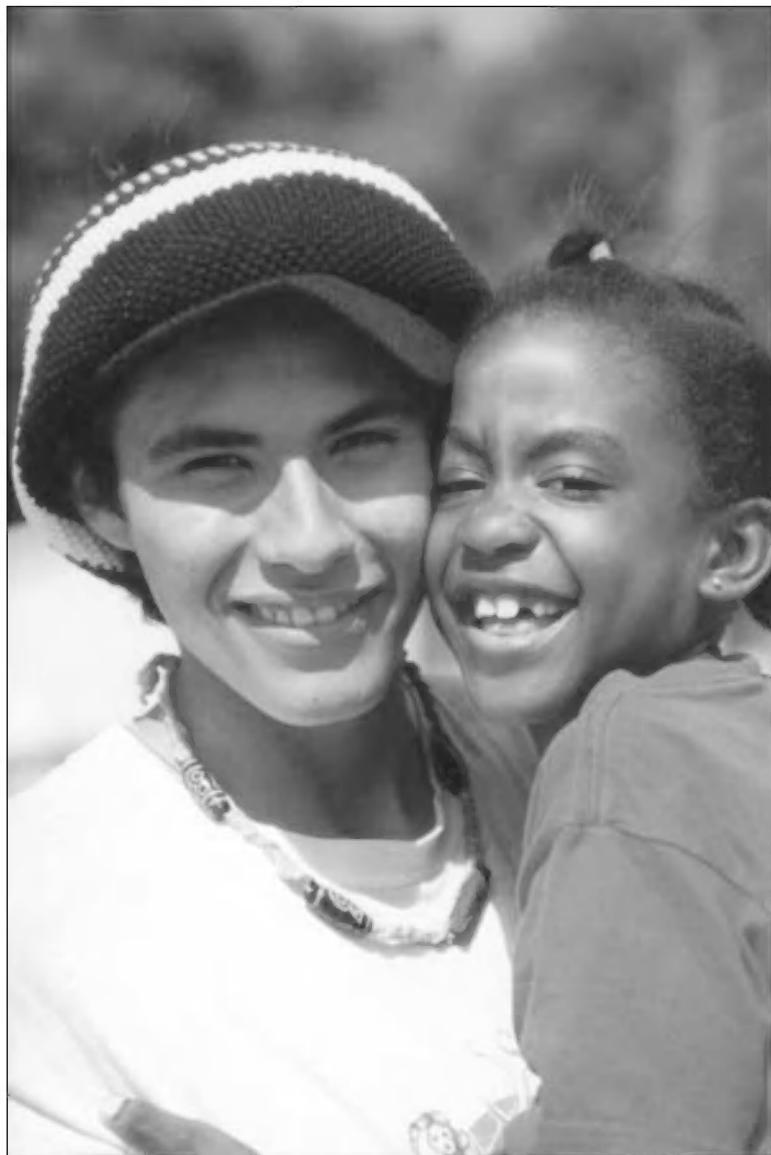
People in Price Hill like what we do. They congratulate us when the walls are pretty. But other people just try to put people down.

People separate us teens from the younger kids. Teens are loud, acting crazy. There's nothing for us to do

here. There should be a big club, you know, with music and food. There's no club or nothing 'cause there's no money, no support. Some people here don't like it at all. I like to play softball. A lot of people play softball here. It's good for the community. But it's not fair; they only have games for boys. Coaches don't let girls play. They don't include girls at all. Coach Tina is not like that, though. She should be the coach all the time, because she won't leave no one out. Even if you're hurt, she still gives you stuff to do. I swear, she don't seem like a grownup.

I want to go to college. I want to be a vet. I like drawing but only when I'm in the mood. Usually being bored gets me in the mood, then I can draw anything. Anything. But artists have a really hard time to do art, it's hard to get people to buy. To be an artist you need people to come to you, you need people to like you. Vets have it better, because every day animals get hurt. Plus, when I draw something, I don't want to give it away. I like drawing flowers, butterflies, horses.

It's not so bad around here. Not much wrong, just the Mill Creek, but that's not just us. I don't think that there is a problem with Lower Price Hill. Everyone says there is. I don't care what people think. The YEP has changed me, like I won't litter that much anymore, but it changes my actions, not my opinions. Everyone thinks we're so bad. I think we're fine. You're the one that is having this problem. I'm not going to be unhappy because you say. I am *happy*. Everyone litters, everyone's got problems. All I know is we have our good times. I got the stuff I need. I'm not rich, but I have everything I need.



*“The whole world means so
much to me!”*

—Kacie

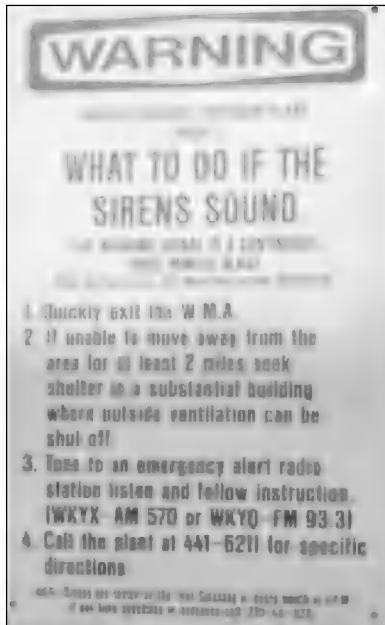
Paducah, Kentucky

The Billion-Dollar Atomic Plant

Paducah, Kentucky is a historic, timeworn old rivertown, population about 44,000, situated on a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. It was founded by the brother of Revolutionary War hero General George Rogers Clark and named in honor of Native American Chief Paduk. During the Civil War, Paducah, then a bustling riverport in the steamboat era, was occupied by the Union forces of General Ulysses S. Grant; Paducahans were sympathetic to the cause of the Confederacy, and the Battle of Paducah in 1864 killed 25 soldiers, wounded 85, and destroyed 60 homes.

After the Civil War, Paducah became a quiet, sleepy place, as the railroads succeeded steamboats as the growing nation's primary means of commercial transportation. Paducah became a farming town, and remained so—until the early 1950s, when it became a power plant town. In 1951 construction began on a U. S. Department of Energy uranium enriching facility, the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Paducah's economy boomed as over 20,000 workers came to the area to build the plant. Completed in 1956, it was celebrated as Paducah's "billion-dollar atomic plant." It was by far the Paducah area's major employer from the 1950s through the mid-1980s.

By then, the Paducah area's major industry had become the medical industry. The first cancer specialists began arriving in the late 1970s, and other medical specialists soon followed, in response to the epidemic rates of cancer, lung disease,



liver disease, heart disease, asthma, and many other severe illnesses caused by the atomic plant's poisoning of the land, air, and water.

In 1985, the Coalition for Health Concern was formed by a Paducah resident, Corrinne Whitehead. The Coalition has grown into a multi-county network of citizens residing in Western Kentucky and across the Ohio in southern Illinois. They are stirred to action by their concern for the suffering of friends and family members stricken by disease, and by their own suffering and loss. Coalition members fight for their right to environmental justice by promoting citizen activism; demanding enforcement of clean air, clean water, and

hazardous waste treatment laws; supporting the public's right to know of risks posed by the presence of dangerous chemicals in the local environment; educating the public about health and safety standards; and strengthening local control over land-use decisions involving toxic waste.

The Coalition for Health Concern has made a significant impact. Many Paducah area residents have become active in the fight for environmental justice, and the Coalition has been recognized as "the best grassroots group in the United States" by nationally recognized environmental organizations.

The work is hard and challenging. One Coalition member, Mark Donham, whose lawsuit blocked the atomic plant's plan to install the world's largest radioactive waste incinerator, says that for all the success the Coalition has had fighting for environmental justice, "they're still polluting the hell out of us. This area is saturated with people suffering from cancer, from birth defects, from a million different terrible things. It just infuriates you that this was done to them—and that it's still being done.

"Sometimes the people don't feel there's anything they can do about it. But there's a lot we can do. The Coalition has accomplished a great deal of good, and the work goes on. We'll be in the fight for a long time to come. And hopefully, after us, somebody else will come along. . . ."

The Coalition for Health Concern can be reached at Route 9, Box 25, Benton, Kentucky 42075; phone 502-527-1217

RONALD LAMB

Contamination Everywhere

I was born right here in Paducah, Kentucky. I've lived here on this farm since I was brought home. When I was a kid we played on the creeks—you know, just did what all kids do. We just didn't know it was a contaminated creek. We'd fish. There used to be beaver dams that crossed the creek and we'd tear them out and wade around in the river. There wasn't nothing in there but little perch. They never got very big.

This is the red zone. We're in the warning zone. It's a two-mile radius from the plant. My house is approximately two miles northwest of the plant. This farm has been in the family off and on for over 100 years. When World War II started, they came over here and bought this area up for a TNT factory. When my dad got out of the service they gave the service men the chance to buy the property back. They put everybody's name in a hat, shuffled it up. He drew his own home place out of the hat. So I mean, he was proud of it. He felt lucky when he drew his own home place. Just before he died he said, "You know, I don't think I was as lucky as I thought I was." He says, "I think it killed me."

The plant, Paducah Gaseous Diffusion, was a federal facility so you just didn't question it. Everybody said you don't want to know what's going on over there; and you don't need to know what's going on over there. You just grew up with it. It's owned by the United States government, but Union Carbide was the first contractor and then Martin Marietta took over. Then Lockheed Martin and Marietta merged and now it went

private. When it shuts down it's really going to hurt. A lot of tax dollars is going to have to go for cleanup.

Union Carbide ran it when I was growing up and I was sick all my life. I mean, I had allergies. I would get to where I couldn't breathe. Choke at night, couldn't lay down without choking. By the time I reached sixth grade I'd already missed a year of school. Finally we found a doctor in Indiana for allergies. He just said, "You just don't have any immune system." I still played and went on.

We didn't connect nothing to the plant till me and my mother and my dad all got sick. I went to bed healthy one night, and woke up in the morning and had some problems. It was severe intestinal problems. We still didn't think too much about it. We just thought we had the flu or something. The normal treatment didn't work so we went to a specialist. They checked me for all sorts of things: amoebae, parasites, bacteria, you name it. It didn't help. About three or four months later, it was a doctor just threw up his hands in Paducah and he said, "I've tested you for everything known to mankind. I don't know what's wrong with you."

We already knew there was contamination about a mile and a half up the road from us in some wells. I mean we brought that up when we first got sick and they said, "Oh no, the creek would stop anything from coming down to ya'll." After you go to all the doctors and the specialists and you mention where you live, they send you out. If you brought up Lockheed Martin or Martin Marietta you were out the door, going to see

another doctor.

We found some documents that said there was plutonium in three wells, and ours was the second highest. We called them up and questioned them about that. They said, "Oh, it's no plutonium down there. We don't do things like that." Even the State Radiation Division said there's no plutonium down there. Of course plutonium's a bone seeker. It gives you bone cancer. My dad. . . . The bone cancer's what killed him.

Of course before that, we'd found technetium in our garden—TC-99. It's a radioactive element that is manmade, so I mean you know, it don't come from a whole lot of places. They've got worlds of it. At one time I had a document that said they released over 3,000 curies to this creek down here. It was in our food, in the vegetables. We haven't raised a garden in years but there's still a lot that do. That's what we was eating out of the year that we got sick, so we haven't raised one since then. The technetium was growing in the turnip greens. They say it's real susceptible to root uptake. It will grow right into the plant.

I was awful mad when I first started fighting, and you know how you are when you're mad. I wasn't never one to speak out, but for the first time I talked. I mentioned they ought to close down the plant. You mention that, you had yourself something. My mother and my dad and myself and my wife, we decided all we could do, if they didn't want to do right, we'd try to put them on the map. I started calling people all over the country. Of course the first thing

you do is contact your state representatives, your congressman. There are lots of votes over there at the plant, so you don't get a lot of help there.

I don't see how other people in the area couldn't be aware. I don't know if they care or not. If they work at the plant I'm sure they don't see it as that much of a threat. People here still don't want to speak out against the government and the contractor that your grandson or your uncle works for. It's just bred in us not to say or question. I don't know how many generations it takes to get over that.

You can't blame the workers for doing what they did. They were ordered to do it. They probably didn't know what they were pouring out. A lot of the workers live around here.

We wanted a safe water supply, we wanted safe food. We fought them pretty hard and we got city water lines. But it was out of the goodness of their hearts—the "good neighbor policy." I've asked them to buy us out and move us off. But there's a lot of people in this community, that's not what they want to do. I can't force them to. That's what we want.

It's just a continuous fight and I'm getting awful tired from the part I've been playing. Just wore out. If it's not affecting your health physically, it's affecting your health mentally. It's not a day goes by you're not thinking about it.

How do you fight them? You don't have that many ways you can go at it so you have to go through the legal system. You read in all the books and everything, the government claims they own all the radiation, the radioactive material. I told them basically they can come and get their contamination.

I won't call any of them a liar; they just stop short of telling the truth. I mean I've had some good friends that worked over there. They'll tell you just what they want you to know and then they'll spoon feed you that. And they denied plutonium being

over here. Technesium, plutonium, imesium, neptunium; that's all been scattered around here.

I went to a meeting and I asked a man. I said, at what level would you post a area of contamination for plutonium. I said, would you post an area of plutonium that was 45 times above background level? "Yes sir, we sure would, we would rope it off." I said, I got a spot on my farm, it's 45 times above background level. I said, its not roped off. Well, it wasn't long that man set down.

I asked the EPA man, if I was taking a drink of water and they know that there was a classified element in there would they tell me? He said "absolutely not." They were real proud that they found a cleaning solvent to trichloroethylene in the wells. They were real proud when they found the technesiyum because that was a mild substance, you know, according to them. Just as long as it hangs around for 213,000 years don't mean a whole lot, but it's mild. It's going to get you a little at a time, It's going to take several million years for it to catch up to you.

There's a lot of people that actually care but they're scared to say anything because their family works there. Intimidation—we've had a few phone calls. But, you think you're dying; a little intimidation isn't going to hurt you. I mean I was sick; what else are they going to do to me other than put me out of my misery? Sometimes you feel a little uncomfortable going to the mailbox. Opening up the flap on it, just stuff like that. There may be no call for it but you think about it. You'd make a joke about it.

I went to the hospital one night and I had a man who was the head of health and physics over at the plant as my next of kin. My wife wasn't on it, my parents' name wasn't on it. The woman at the desk said, "Do you work at Lockheed and Martin?" I said, no ma'am, I've never worked there. She said who's your next of kin? I said my wife. She said she'd never seen nothing like it. She brought us behind the counter to see

this man as my next of kin. I asked when I went to Oak Ridge what that meant. They said three things: you're a walking dead man, they don't want nothing to happen to you without them knowing it, or they're going to take your body parts. All I know is that they told me to go home and calm down. I was about to blow that night. If I'd had a car wreck or anything nobody in my family would have known it.

We went over to the cancer registry in Paducah and they didn't want to talk to us. They said there's no more cancer here than anywhere. The problem is when my dad passed away they wrote down respiratory failure. I told them write down cancer; that's what caused his death. I said write it down. If you don't write that down that's what skews the data. And they want the data skewed.

If you want to talk about the plant giving you jobs, you know, the economic benefit, I guess you could say it has. But it's got a lot of contamination. Of course we've got over 2,000 acres of groundwater that's contaminated. There's just contamination everywhere. We've got heavy metals. We've got radioactive stuff. So I don't know how you balance that out.

I've thought about moving but you're sort of tied to it. I mean, who's going to buy it? If you tell anybody what's on your property, then you can't set a price on it. I've argued. I told the plant manager. I said, you stole my retirement. Ya'll don't look at things that way; if someone broke into your house and takes your TV, you're going to call the sheriff and tell him I want my TV back. They came in here and basically stole the value of my property. I don't have anybody to go to and say give it back. A lot of these people, they retire, they take their property and they subdivide it. How can you take your farm that's contaminated and put houses on it? They stole your health, your retirement, and your security, and they don't want to pay for it. They don't want to be held accountable.

ALFRED PUCKET

This Was a Nice Community

My name is Alfred Blake Pucket. I'm 75 years old. This area, I think, is a beautiful place to live in. But I don't think our environment is too good now. I think there's too many chemical companies, and polluting of the air, and global warming, and all of this. I'm really concerned about the future of our country and our way of life. I think we should have respect for the earth and we should look ahead to the future. I think we're responsible for seven generations ahead to see that they have a clean and safe environment. And I don't think these chemical companies are looking to the future. They're just looking for the bottom line now—making a profit—and they're trying to convince the people that it's not hurting our environment. But I can see the difference, and it's hurting our environment.

And it is contaminating the area that we live in. One man lived here, he got sick, they carried him to the hospital. They found out his water was contaminated from the atomic plant. They came around and tested our water, and they said our water wasn't contaminated. We went and got the State of Kentucky and they came out here and tested my well, and they said it was contaminated with TCE and TC 99. The boy that tested it, he said, "Don't let them convince you that your water is not contaminated." He said, "It is contaminated."

People from the plant started coming out and testing the water. Every month they'd send me a letter saying that our water was all right. I didn't believe them, 'cause I had these

other people testing my water.

They'd call me over to the plant to a laboratory, to show me how effective their ability was to test water. I went in there and the girl said that they were very capable of finding any contamination. I asked her, "What would be the chances of you making a mistake?" And she said, "Oh it would be very slim." I said, "What do you think the chances would be that you'd make a mistake two times in a row?" And she looked down at the floor and she wouldn't answer me. I said, "Would it be one in a million or ten million, or what?" And she wouldn't answer me.

So I said, "Well, according to the testing that I had done by other people, the last two tests you made, you made a mistake." And they ushered me out of there right away. They didn't want to talk to me anymore.

I was getting sick every month. It was like I had the flu, and I'd get over it, be all right for a while—then I'd get it again. I went to my doctor; he said, "You ought to have your well tested." So that's when we had our well water tested by the state. Later on, they ran everyone public water for Paducah. They furnished us with water. Now we feel safe about the drinking water.

Radioactivity was always contaminating the whole area all around here. At the atomic plant they were supposed to be cleaning the building. They were supposed to vacuum up that contamination and put it in cans and store it

away. But they went in the building with an air nozzle and moved that dust up into the air and reversed the fans, and they just blew all that contamination out into the air. So we've been battling with them ever since.

I've got a claim and the whole neighborhood is suing. One little girl in the neighborhood was born without a nose. Another little girl was born with six fingers on her. That was a result of the atomic plant.

Another one of my neighbors, his daughter came down with leukemia. He worked at the atomic plant and he asked them could she have gotten that leukemia from me, because when I got home for the night she'd run out and meet me, and I'd pick her up in my arms and we'd go in and sit down and watch television. So he asked them if I brought that contamination home and she got that from me, and got leukemia.

They got rid of him soon after that. They put him to work in one department, then moved him to another department. Then they called him in to say, "We've tried you in all of these departments, you're just not working out. We're gonna have to let you go." And so they let him out. And I thought about his little girl dying later on, and I thought that was really cruel. They could have been, you know, sympathetic to him, and let him stay on and work and then he would have his insurance, you know. But I guess they wanted to avoid any responsibility.

They don't care about people's lives, you know. The profit is what they're out for. That's the way it is



with that atomic plant

They've tried to cover everything up every way they can. There were a lot of people, I think it was something like 150 people, that worked over at the plant that got cancer and died.

They gave money to some of the women that lost their husbands, they gave them \$150,000. I guess they thought that would cover it up. One of my best friends over there, he got brain cancer and he died. Before he died, I asked him, I said, "Do you think your cancer is caused from working in the plant?" He said, "Oh, there's no doubt about that." And I said, "Is it bad?" And he said, "Well, no one can even imagine how I've suffered." For a little while he just went out of his mind. He would only be conscious for a little while then he'd go off out of his mind.

They gave us a book not long ago, and they said there wasn't anything here that would hurt anybody. They tried to gloss over it, you know, they said you can eat that stuff and it won't hurt ya. And I said, well you show me a man that eats plutonium and I'll show you a dead man.

I worked at the atomic plant for 12 years. Working over there one day I was down in a pipe and I got gassed. While I was down there the system came on or something and I was gassed. It made me sick and they carried me to the suspender. I was put on the hot list for a month or so. I wasn't allowed to be around any

more contamination.

After that they took my work away from me. I had a welding machine and a layout table, and I was just supposed to stand there 8 hours a day. I'd go to my boss and say you got something for me to do and he'd say no, I just want you stand here, stand here for your job.

So I stood there for as long as I could take it. And I stood it for a long time. I had five little kids and I felt like I had a responsibility towards them. And so I stayed because I had the responsibility of raising my family.

Finally they were gonna lay off three men and have a reduction in force and I said, "Well, give me one of them. I'm gonna go back home." I said, "I may not make it farming, but I sure am gonna try."

I came home and started farming and raising cattle and I've got along just fine.

This was a nice community to live in. It was a farming community, and everybody farmed. A couple of farms went back six generations. It was a nice community. I'd rather live here than any place I've ever lived in my life. This is my home.

But as things stand now, with all this contamination and everything, I'd probably rather live somewhere else.

About two weeks ago the people

from the atomic plant had a meeting and I went over and told them, I said, "We had a nice community here until ya'll come. People liked living here." I said, "As far as I'm concerned, we'd just like you to take your plant and go somewhere else. We don't want it no more." They just sat there with their mouths open and they didn't respond.

I carried my little grandson once and we went down on the creek fishing and we caught fish and the fish had cancer blotches on them. He said, "Grandpa, we gonna take this fish home and eat it," and I said, "I wouldn't eat one of those cancerous fish for a million dollars."

The deer here, they tested the deer and found out that they were contaminated. And one guy over here at the game reserve killed a deer. It had knots all over it. He wanted to carry that deer home and eat it. And they told him, they said, "Naw, you can't have that deer." He said, "But I want to take it home and eat it."

The plant told us, "Well, them deer, they won't hurt you." But I don't want to eat them. Vegetables out of our garden and the deer that we got around here, I don't want to eat them or the fish or anything else that has been contaminated with the radioactivity.

I don't know what my grandson's future is gonna be. But I hope that it'll be cleaner and safer than what ours is. Just for me, I'm hoping that they'll close that plant.



The Crump Community, Memphis

Concerned Citizens versus Industry

Located in North Memphis is a small neighborhood known as the Crump Community. The primarily African American neighborhood, of around two hundred people, spans four streets and has around fifty houses. The homeowner rate is 85 to 90 percent. Many of the families in Crump have been there for over 45 and 60 years. Their roots go deep, and the people have faced many injustices.

In the earlier part of last century, a politically powerful European American land owner by the name of E. H. Crump hired an African American by the name of "Teet" Watkins as an overseer for an extensive plot of farmland. This expanse of land bordered the Wolf River, which flows into the great Mississippi. The Wolf River was home to woodlands where people could pick from fig, apple, and plum trees; collect grape-like fruits known as "muskydines"; pick wild

blackberries and wildflowers, and hunt rabbits or go fishing. The only environmental threat the area saw was flooding from the river.

Small plots of land 40 feet wide and 135 feet deep could be purchased from Crump through "Teet" Watkins. The community began in the early 1920s. Watkins established a C.M.E. (Colored Methodist Episcopal; now called Christian Methodist Episcopal) Church in 1927, and farmers moved to the area from the Fayette and Hardamon counties of Eastern Tennessee, and from the DeSoto and Marsha counties of Mississippi.

Crump was an agrarian community. Crops such as cotton and corn could be seen in rows, and families had vegetable gardens on their land. Others raised hogs and chickens. Wooden homes were built, and the families occupying them possessed a strong communal ethic. The people shared a lot; one could walk next door

for an egg, for a cup of sugar, or just to drink coffee and talk. The adults watched out for each other's children, and people could always leave their doors open at night. Children could go to the Wolf River where they were taught to swim. There was no backyard activity; all cookouts or gatherings took place in the inviting atmosphere of the front porch.

The Crump neighborhood has seen many evolutions since its beginnings. During the 20s and 30s jobs were to be found working with cotton. Then came the 40s, and industry settled in as a result of the war efforts. Agriculture was not destroyed, but jobs were now to be found in factories. Packing plants and dozens of chemical plants moved into the area. During the 50s concrete and brick houses became prevalent, as well as telephones, running water, and indoor toilets. The agrarian aspect of the community stood strong until after



the Vietnam War. Today few vegetable gardens exist.

The Wolf River had many pockets and tributaries until the Army Corps of Engineers came in to clear the way for transportation. With dynamite, big earthmovers, and powerful water pumps they "straightened out" parts of the river, leaving two small lakes and roadways. The wildlife was impacted significantly. Earlier, the residents had to walk a half mile or farther to reach the train tracks; by the late 70s and 80s the neighborhood found itself alongside an expressway, and there were roads where there used to be tributaries of the river. The train tracks leading to industry have the neighborhood closed in on three sides. Loaded freights can delay outgoing traffic for twenty and thirty minutes at a time.

The Crump Community has had to deal with noxious odors from factories and industrial plants since the 50s. It was said at one time that smells coming into the neighborhood could put one to sleep. A slaughterhouse and packinghouse that bordered the neighborhood closed down to become the Memphis Container Plant, where companies could pay to have their waste disposed of. The land became an open dump for toxic wastes. Eventually the company shut

down and left the area highly poisoned.

Velsicol, a chemical industry found down the road from Crump, has gained worldwide recognition as being the sole producer of the now banned and known carcinogenic pesticides chlordane and heptachlor, of which traces have been found even in polar bears of the Arctic Circle. Velsicol poured their pesticides into nearby rivers, as well as on their property in a pit the size of a football field. Both Velsicol and the Memphis Container Plant have been recognized as Superfund Sites. The state has put out warnings not to consume the fish from the Wolf River.

In the late 80s, and early 90s, concerned residents came together as a result of their concerns and fears about finding children playing at the site of the former Memphis Container Plant. A neighborhood group was formed, the Concerned Citizens of Crump, and a petition was circulated requesting clean up of the waste site. The EPA came in and spent \$750,000 cleaning up over 1,500 barrels of toxic waste. Velsicol had an on-site incinerator that was emitting dioxin-laden air, and the Concerned Citizens of Crump won a victory by forcing the incinerator be shut down for ten years. The night the community

decided to celebrate this victory, a 55,000-gallon storage tank of dichloropentadiene exploded into flames at the Velsicol plant and smoke consumed the air. The plant sent out no alerts or information concerning how to handle the situation.

The Concerned Citizens of Crump are still in a struggle with the chemical industry, and at times find the industry attempting to divide the community. The chemical plants strategically give out toys to the community's children around the holidays, give monetary contributions to families in hopes they will keep silent, as well as participate in an adopt-a-school program with the local elementary school.

Crump is financially the second poorest neighborhood in Memphis. Many people find themselves struggling with day to day living. Very few people, if any, from the community are employed by the local chemical industries. Yet the people of Crump still share a strong community. There is an annual Labor Day/Neighbor Day celebration, as well as an Earth Day celebration. Many residents still watch out for each other's children. Families still take care of each other. The Concerned Citizens of Crump continue to work for the betterment of their community.

JESSE THREAT

It Was All in Good Heart

My family has been in Crump since it began, in 1920. My great uncle, he was like an overseer, he would sell lots to people when the area was being developed. He helped start the church. There was all cotton growing land around here, cotton, corn, and a few other things, I'm sure. Almost everybody had a garden in their yard, growing vegetables for their family. We had a garden, my dad used to have us kids out digging in it. We had a big family, most of the families in Crump was big. I had five older brothers and one younger, and three sisters. Plus my grandmother from my dad's side lived with us, and my grandfather from my mother's side. It was good growing up in Crump, family took care of family, and most of us in the neighborhood were related somehow. People would sit out on their front porch, barbecuing, playing music, having family gatherings, whatever it was. That is the way it was done.

Life over in Crump was a good childhood dream. Lots of kids, we would run all over the neighborhood, just playing. We had pathways through people's yards connecting one place to another. One woman got tired of us running across her yard so she built one fence and then another right next to it, so that we had a pathway connecting the streets. After that we could cut from street to street in seconds flat. There was an empty lot on the next street over, and that is where we would play football, baseball, that sort of thing.

All around us was bottomland, forests. We were at the edge of the city, so whenever we wanted we could run right in the bottom and pick fruits from the vine. Those were the days,

fresh blackberries and muskydimes! We would pick baskets of "muskydimes" and sell 'em. Wolf River came running right through here, where the expressway is now—the Army Corps of Engineers came in and straightened out the river. And there were lots of fish in that river. We used to go swimming down there.

In 1964 a young man, "Iggy," was learning how to swim in that river. I could just about take you to the spot on the expressway where he drowned. When they began to build that expressway they brought the dynamite out and started blasting away the bottomland, pumped the water out. Now there are two lakes down there, one on either side of the expressway. Once upon a time, not to sound like a fairy tale, those used to be fields of soybeans and cotton. I never believed man could do anything, but they made a believer out of me then. I'm serious, when they went into that bottom and cut that expressway up through there, they made me a believer.

Taking away the wildlife and the fishing and the hunting and bringing cars in through there, that's an environmental factor, dealing with the ozone. It happens in sprawling cities. People moving in, more people being produced than dying. This particular area has changed a lot. I would have settled for it to stay the same, really. Quiet, no cars running through. Busses would have been nice, though. Once upon a time we had to walk about half a mile or so across the railroad tracks to catch the bus. Of course, that was due to segregation.

As a child the only thing we had that I wouldn't want now was Rhyan's [a slaughterhouse and meat-packing company]. It later became a chemical infested business and we did not know that, until they began to investigate. I am saying they had chemicals that would put you to sleep just by a sniff. The Earth rotates and dust blows and it contaminates our neighborhood. They cleaned it up and now that property is for sale. After the sandpit left up the road, people began

to dump there, which they still are doing now. Big time dump! Anything anybody wants to get rid of, they say, "Well, let's take it out here behind Crump and dump it."

We had a store up here big enough to have a delivery boy, used to deliver up and down these streets. Communication sure was good, without the help of telephones, just people keeping their eye out for one another. Grandparents were always watching you; couldn't get away with nothing with them around! But it was all in good heart.

Yeah, it was a time when boys were boys, girls were girls, we used to laugh and dance and have a good time. We used to have these "heaven and hell" parties put on by the churches. You go to the party and reach your hand in a bag full of papers saying "heaven" or "hell" on 'em. Pull a paper out, and if it said "hell" you would get hot spaghetti; if it said "heaven" you got ice cream and cake. Then you'd go dancing.

We had all sorts of things going on here in Crump. Life was a little more simple back then. Back beyond the railroad tracks there was a hill with a big tree and a muskydime vine growin' on it. We used to hold onto that vine and take a big running start and swing out across there and swing back. *Wheee*, you talk about havin' fun! Used to burn rags and shoes to keep the mosquitoes away. It was an ideal place to be brought up in. But a lot of people moved away. A few of 'em still come back. We have Mother's Day and Labor Day and some folks come back and celebrate with us, you know.

I started to move about 10 years ago, you know, thinking it was about time to move. Mr. Green lived across the street; he said, "Naw, Jesse, don't do that, you a good neighbor, you don't need to leave." He died a few years ago, he's gone, his wife's gone, new family moved in there. I been here 52 years. Crump has been very good to me. I would like to stay here, I would like to die in my house, I would like to live here until I die.

BALINDA MOORE

It's Up To People Like Us

I am a pastor and an environmental activist. I grew up here as a child and I've been back here now about ten years. Not much has changed in this community. The houses are the same. As far as nature is concerned, there is not much to see anymore. There are no longer leaves growing on vines, no rabbits, no wild roses or "muskydimes." There is a lot more haze, a lot more odor. Changes of odor are occurring because of the chemical companies and changes in chemicals they produce. Companies continue to produce more and more toxic chemicals. I remember growing up as a child, I always thought that the Quaker Oats plant was an oatmeal plant—then we realized that it was more of a chemical plant. It was just a bit frightening.

I've been active in the Crump community since 1992. I wondered why the neighborhood was so poor and why there were so many blights in the community. One of the blights was old Rhyan's Rendering Company, later known as the Memphis Containment Plant. It's two blocks from here and was an abandoned building with 10,000 barrels of hazardous and toxic wastes. When this was uncovered, community members became active in getting the waste cleaned up. People sent a petition locally, state-and nationwide. The congressman responded and there was an EPA clean up order. They spent \$750,000 on the clean-up project. This kind of money has never been spent in Crump before.

The majority of people in this area are retired or low-income people, but it's a family community, not a project. These people are homeowners and their families have lived here for forty or fifty years. But people are

worried about what they are going to eat the next day and how much a loaf of bread is going to cost. It's hard to focus on health issues when you just want to make it day to day. Most people know something is not right, but they can't put it together. They know when they get here it smells like it doesn't in other neighborhoods, and it's a lot hazier.

Somebody has to come in and make people aware. It's up to people like us who are aware about the environment to make it a mission and a passion to make sure people are informed.

Velsicol's relationship with environmentally involved people is very strained. They do attempt to talk with people, but when you start asking for hardcore facts they withhold information. I get calls from people in the city who have seen my name in the papers. Someone called me once saying their dad and uncle both died from cancer. The doctor told them that it had been related to something the brothers worked in, but Velsicol would not release that information. I called Velsicol and they said they couldn't imagine which brothers I was talking about.

I don't really have funds and facilities to document this, but I could tell you a lot. People that are interested and active just call me. I fax elected officials but get very little response from them on environmental issues. I don't care how many houses they build, if they are built on contaminated soil they are no good for any human being. We need to build people up. Build their health up. We don't have a health plan or doctor's office anywhere in this community.

Communities are not informed about what is being manufactured. I know that when they were producing heptachlor and chlordane here, that stuff was being used as pesticides in Third World countries. Now the companies have changed and I am not even sure of what they produce. There have been a lot of changes. They don't go about advertising what they

manufacture. But I do know that Velsicol is continuing to use a toxic waste incinerator. They do have to reduce what they produce, but that doesn't mean the ground will stop being polluted.

We cannot let misinformation go on. When Velsicol said that dioxins do not cause cancer, I said, "Can you document it? Can you document it?" In their community meetings I have to go out of order because everyone sits there and says nothing. It takes a lot out of me emotionally. There was a spill one day in the drainage space around here, at the Southern Cotton Oil. We saw they had masks on and they were cleaning up the spill. They claimed it was vegetable oil. But I said, "Why do you need to be in full gear to clean up vegetable oil?" A lot of the spill went into the Wolf River. They pumped it there without any kind of treatment. It was more than a twenty-gallon spill.

I wonder what it's going to take for people to realize that their health problems come first. I believe that environmental justice is as important as our civil rights. I don't think people know that we have the right to clean air. They don't know that our right is taken away from us when a company comes in and pollutes. We are already denied privileges of living a full life financially, but to have the things that really count—the rain, the air, the birds and animals—is a human right, and I can see it being taken away from us. It's unbelievable!

My vision is to see things being made that are environmentally safe, responsibly researched, and all the toxic waste production in this neighborhood to cease. I'd rather eat a vegetable that is rotten in the side than a chemically poisoned one.

I don't feel environmentally safe in this community. I feel that if they don't hear the quiet army, or the honorable army, it's going to come in thunder and lightning to wake people up. My voice will be heard. We are being raped. I will not be silent and let these people come to my neighborhood and do this to me.



“We all breathe the same air.”

—*Gregory*

Alsen, Louisiana

Fighting Back in Cancer Alley

Alsen, a community nestled along a scenic highway between the Mississippi River and a ridiculous number of industries, lies just north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It begins the stretch of the Mississippi known as "Cancer Alley." It's an old, proud community of 560 families, dating back to just after the Civil War.

When the enslaved peoples working on the Springfield Plantation gained their freedom, they settled close by and formed the Alsen community.

Louisiana was in a rush to industrialize in the 1950s. The Mississippi River was a prime location for industry. In 1955 the state government's resolution to establish industrial zones in East Baton Rouge Parish left Alsen with four of the parish's five designated zones. African Americans were kept from voting and Alsen, with a 98 percent African American population, had no voice in the decision to industrialize. Instead, the government made decisions without the input of the people they would be impacting.

Prior to the industrial zoning Alsen was home to one landfill, a tank company, and Acme Brick. It wasn't long before a rapid stream of industries moved in. First came Grace Chemical, then Foster Grant, then UniRoyal, and then Rollins Hazardous Waste Facility. Today, Alsen is home to Doltish, Exxon Idensidine Polyethylene Plant, Exxon Resin Plant, Grow Chemical, BFI recycling, Agway, Bayou Coating, Savage Industries, LaBarge Pipe and Steel, Alcoa Primary Metals, Exide Lead



Smelter, Union Tank Car Company, and two petroprocessor sites. The northern and southern borders of Alsen are city garbage dumps.

Needless to say, the toxic load from all of these industries is in the millions and millions of pounds. About 80 percent of the chemicals let out into the Alsen community are neurotoxins, meaning they affect human beings prenatally, throughout infancy, and for the rest of their lives. The first year that the EPA required toxic release inventories, Alsen's

reading was 48 million pounds of just those few toxic chemicals that the inventory required.

Before industry moved in, Alsen was unpolluted. Alsen residents enjoyed the sustainable resources of their land, fishing, hunting, farming, gardening. Now it's hard enough to stay healthy, much less raise a healthy garden.

Before industry came to Alsen, Devil's Swamp was a virtual paradise for kids and sportsmen alike. Its 3,000 acres were ideal for hiking, swimming, and fishing. Surrounding industries used the swamp as a dumping ground from 1965 until 1980. Now much of the swamp is polluted with toxic waste.

In 1980 almost everybody in Alsen was sick. People suffered from cancer, asthma, sinus problems, skin rashes nose bleeds, bleeding gums, breathing, learning disorders—all clearly linked to the industries' presence.

Now Alsen is fighting back, and has had some success in reducing industry's pollution, largely due to the efforts of Alsen's Coalition for Community Action, a group led by the later Mrs. Mary McCastle, who was an activist for her community well into her 80s.

Other past and present residents have fought for a clean and healthy place to live. Community organizers are striving for an Alsen with no operating landfills, non-industrial zoning, the halt of any Exxon expansion. With the growing strength of this community effort, residents hope Alsen will be a place where people once again can live healthy lives.

WALTER WRIGHT

Finding the Strength to Fight

I've been in Alsen about 51 years. I came here in 1950. I was about seven years old. We moved into Devil's Swamp. We had a big farm. We grew our food. We used to raise something of everything: cotton, corn, potatoes, peas, greens—name it, we raised it. And eggs, yellow eggs. Not the eggs you go to buy at the store today, those white eggs, but the yellow eggs. That was all the eggs I knew, the best eggs! That's right. We called them yard eggs. And we had a lot of pasture that the cows grazed in. Most people farmed; some had public jobs and farmed. When they come off their jobs in the evening, they go in the field. Just like when we come home from school, we go in the fields. That's the only part I hated about farming: I had to go in the field. I couldn't go play, not like those other kids. But it paid off.

We had a spring back there. It wasn't a man made spring, but a man built a cement foundation around it. And that was our source of water—drinking water, washing water, you know, whatever we needed water for, that was our only source of water at the time. It was clean. Back there where the spring was, we used to go back there down up under the hill and play. Go farther back and we could hunt and fish. We had some swimming holes back there, and those big old trees been there since the Civil War, we would play up under—a lot of shade!

Life was good back then. Nobody was sick. Everybody was healthy. I grew up healthy back there in that swamp, and eating good off what we raised. My childhood back there was



amazing. I loved it. Life was good; life was really full for me.

Alsen was a place that was unpolluted at the time. But I'd say in the late 50s, early 60s, industry started disrupting that. The plants started easing in on us. Grace Chemical, which is now owned by Exxon, was the first plant that moved in. Then after Grace moved in, Foster-Grant built below them, which is now Deltech. And then Uniroyal, and those was the only three at the time. Then in the early 60s, that's when Rollins came to town. *Big dogs came to town!* Cancer Alley itself came to town!

We used to see trucks hauling stuff up that back road, but at the time we didn't know what they was hauling. All we knew, they was hauling up that road. We didn't know they was taking that stuff up to the

swamp and just dumping it. Now when we used to hunt back in that swamp, and fish, we'd come across 55-gallon drums thrown in the woods back there. And they was corroding and stuff was running out of them. We knew it was some kind of poisonous stuff, you know; we had sense enough to know that, we knew it was nothing good. But we really didn't think nothing of it. It was just in piles and laying there. Rollins buried a lot of stuff back there; they buried whole tank cars full of waste back there, you know.

They eventually caught up with them and made them dig them up. They might didn't dig them all up. But all the time that stuff was contaminating Devil's Swamp and getting in the groundwater and all that, which we didn't know nothing about at that time. Thinking about that now, a lot of the stuff we saw back there, that's what it was and that's what polluted Devil's Swamp. That swamp probably never will be worth anything anymore. Rollins done the damage.

It's very upsetting. It's outrageous that you can't even go back there and hunt and fish no more because it's contaminated. They've got game and stuff back there but it's not fit to eat. They want to tell us that we can eat small portions of fish a month. Well, I don't want to eat nothing no time, you know, because the swamp is contaminated and the fish and the animals are contaminated, so I don't eat none of it notime.

A little bit of poison every month? That mounts up. It's bad enough we're breathing it in, and drinking it through the water. I don't

wanna be eating it, too.

The spring still existed until Rollins built back there. They destroyed those old trees and they destroyed the spring too. Alsen is just not a good place to live now. That's why we call it Cancer Alley. But back in the time it was a sportsman's paradise for hunting and fishing, and living, raising gardens. Now we got trees dying, they just die, just up and die, and it's just from all the pollution and stuff, you know. And now you can't even raise a chicken, I bet. And all them trees back there in that swamp been destroyed, those was real historical trees. It's a very great injustice to us in the community.

In our community, since industry been here we've had more cancer death than we ever had. We used to didn't have that, people dying of cancer. We have more people dying of cancer, and kidney problems, and suffering with sinus and asthma than we ever had. Until Rollins came to town and these other plants putting out all that pollution, we never had that problem. A lot of our people have died within the past few years. It's a sad situation.

And they are *still* polluting Alsen—even more so. We got that dump right in the middle of two black communities and next door to our church. Now that's nothing but disrespect. That's saying we don't even exist.

It makes me mad as hell. I really get mad when I get to talking about the way these people come in and do industry and you don't live here and have no say-so. And we fight, fight, fight. The DEQ ain't worth a dime. Because they still issue permits to industry and they are supposed to be for the *people*. DEQ, EPA, they supposed to be protecting people but they in bed with industry. And the officials, they in bed with industry too, 'cause this government, they ain't nothing but pro-industry. It's all about the mighty dollar. People don't count, the dollar counts. If we could get our officials to serve the people that put them in office, maybe we could stand



a better chance. But until we can do that, it's gonna be an uphill battle.

They changed from Rollins to Safety Kleen. Now Safety Kleen, they still receive hazardous waste. They don't have no more incinerator, because we were able to make Rollins tear the incinerator down, just a handful of us. Now they're wanting to come in on us with another landfill, Louisiana Land Systems. We were able to stop that for the time being, anyway. Because that was gonna be sewage sludge and petroleum waste, it was gonna be radioactive and stuff and that wasn't gonna be good at all. But I'm glad we came to stop that. It's an ongoing fight for us. We are surrounded by industry. We are *surrounded*. Heavy impact—and they say they want to expand! I don't know when it's gonna stop.

And the next five years? Hopefully we can get them to close that dump down, that landfill there, hopefully we can close that down. We can get that property right across the street from that rezoned to a non-industrial area; residential instead. And hopefully we can stop any

expansion. Might take longer than five years, but hopefully we can do it.

What first got me involved was Juanita. I had started paying some attention when they started fighting Rollins. She started talking to me about coming to some meetings. Here I am! I've been with them now about five years. And they call people like us who are trying to fight, they call us outlaws, and agitators, and trouble-makers. I'm not out here just fighting for my rights; I'm fighting for yours, too.

Where do I find the strength? I find strength in the Good Lord, who gives us this strength to keep fighting—and you wanting to breathe clean air, and drink clean water, and have somewhere where your kids and grandkids can grow up without having to come down with cancer or kidney disease and things like that, and learning disabilities and all the rest of it. With the Good Lord's help, that gives you strength to fight on for your community, to try to make it better. You don't wanna go through hell all your life. The future generation, that alone gives you strength.

FLORENCE ROBINSON

Celebrate All Victories

I've been a semi-activist most of my adult life. In the 60s, it seemed that I was fighting everyone in the world. When I moved to Alsen I said I wanted to rest. I put blinders on. The bulk of people in Alsen know that there are odors that smell bad; their neighbors have cancer; they can't breathe; the stuff makes them sick when they smell it, but they are not as aware.

I lived in Alsen for 27 years. You wake up in the morning and you feel like you've been shoveling coal all night. You wake up every morning with that heavy hydrocarbon load. I wouldn't be alive until noon. I thought I wasn't a morning person, but I was just an Alsen person. People have respiratory problems, sinuses, difficulty breathing, peripheral nerve damage, Alzheimer's, memory loss. I have the lungs of a person who was a heavy smoker and I don't smoke.

In 1989 Rollins, the commercial hazardous waste facility, applied for a permanent permit and an expansion permit. I helped found the North Baton Rouge Environmental Association and we stopped the expansion permit. Rollins would have been the largest hazardous waste facility in the country. I really don't think people of our community would have survived if Rollins had received that permit.

There was a two-week period in 1993 when every night around 2 am I'd wake up with my head pounding. I started calling the Department of Environmental Quality. I complained every day for about a week. Finally they sent me the data from the fence line monitor at Rollins from 2 am—not data from before 2 when it would

have had time to get to me. They said the air quality was consistent with living in an industrial zone. Now Alsen is always told, "but you are zoned for this." We may be zoned for this but we, the people of Alsen, never approved that zoning. I don't think we need to wait for science to say, "Oh yes, that stuff is bad."

People were constantly pressuring Rollins. They had unlined landfills and sometimes they were open so fumes in plumes got to the community. The incinerators had all sorts of breakdowns and upsets. They got lots of fines. What finally shut them down was economics. When we went before the Board of Commerce and Industry and argued against Rollins getting an industrial tax break on the grounds that they weren't eligible for it, the board walked out of the meeting, but I kept on talking. After I finished, the board returned and voted to give Rollins the tax break.

In 1995 we sued Rollins and the board. It went to the Supreme Court of Louisiana and we won. Our demonstrations and protests scared off companies from using them for waste disposal. The company was downsizing, so they shut the weakest link. They came to the ultimate decision about two years ago. They merged with Laidlaw and now the site is SafetyKleen. There are no more landfills and the incinerator is shut down. They take in waste, categorize it, and send it off.

Long before industry was even known to exist, this area was here, and it became Alsen at least 100 years ago. In Alsen the industry is hidden so

a lot of people don't understand. The industries have gotten away with murder. We did two different surveys in two different sections of the community and we found an asthma rate of 21 percent. In Alsen the water was strange. Those of us who can, drink bottled water; those who can't, do; and those who really can't, drink the tap.

When I lived in Alsen I had no idea how badly impacted I was. A couple of months after I left I realized I was actually feeling good. Kids miss so many school days because they just don't feel good. Bad headaches—so bad you're blind. When people move away the first thing they notice that stops is the headaches. My son's migraines disappeared when we left Alsen.

People in Alsen are very proud people and a little bit secretive. They looked at having cancer as something shameful. The government uses their scientists and industry scientists to say there is no problem. Right now the burden of proof is on the people who live in places like Alsen when it should be on the Exxons and Allied Signals. Alsen is a very old fashioned, very religious community. When we were protesting the dump, one person wanted everyone to get on his or her knees and pray every day at 12. Now I'm not averse to praying, but you have to do more than pray. But, people are tired; they go to work, they come home—they're tired. They don't feel like coming out to a meeting or demonstration.

The hard work is sitting down and making plans, talking to legislators. Most of our group consists of

people 40 years old and up. A few young teens participate with some of the conferences we've gone to. It's an older folks' movement and those of us who are getting old and know it desperately want young people to pick it up. It's a women's movement.

Women are the caretakers. Women look around and see their sick children. Women look around and see their sick husbands. Women talk to their neighbors.

I believe in celebrating all victories, I don't care how small. Your victories are sometimes very subtle. But if you're not in the forefront of the fight you don't even recognize the victories. Today the vultures have truly moved in. There is a focus group to twist the arms of people to say good things about industry. The fact that industry has to spend this energy, is paying somebody to have this focus group to attempt to manipulate the people into saying what industry wants—that's a victory. Things are a little better in Alsen. Pollution is not as extreme as it once was. It's still bad, but it's not as bad as it was.

I teach honors biology at Southern University. I have some freedom and I do bring up this struggle. The main thing I try to do with my students—I want to teach them basic principles. If you understand the basic principles of ecology then you know what's wrong with Exxon emitting all these things in the air.

Industry is out giving a few nickels here and a few nickels there, but you can't sell your house in Alsen and buy equal to what you've got. I refuse to sell my house. It's sitting there. The swamp is reclaiming it.

I'm not anti-industry; I'm anti irresponsible behavior in industry. Right now they are very into buying Alsen. Exxon just had a family fun day in Alsen. Television loves it. Some people just don't see very far. But some people do.

JUANITA STEWART

We Are Constantly Fighting Injustice

I live in a small community of about 1,600 people called Alsen. This community is over 100 years old, yet our government decided to zone our community for industry. We had no say-so in the decision-making in our community. Industry invaded in the 1950s, and Alsen has not been the same.

Our lifestyle has changed. We have health problems now. Before industry came, we had a clean environment. We could hunt, fish, and swim in a place called Devil's Swamp. Now it's polluted.

We have two superfund sites that were created by industry. There were 11 companies. One of the biggest companies that was involved in it was Exxon, a refinery. They literally dumped their waste into an open pit and when it got hot it started burning. And they had other problems there.

We are constantly fighting the injustices done to us. We have a dump, which is called Demolition Debris. It lies in the whole of our community, just across the street from an old subdivision of our community, which was called Lincoln Heights, adjacent to the church. We fought hard to stop it because it's such an injustice. It's just so close to a residential area, plus as I told them in my speech, we could have rats, roaches, all kinds of insects and everything else, along with heavy traffic. And just like I said, it's come to pass.

We had another facility that they wanted to create in our community about two miles north of us. We fought that. Basically it was going to be the same thing that we already had,

except that it was going to have petroleum waste, sewage sludge waste, and other demolition debris—so I guess because of the competition, the DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) decided not to have it near us.

We fought the Exxon Paloffa plant. We must not let any more toxic emissions in our community. We went to court January/February of last year to stop them. While we were fighting them they were still in operation, but from what the judge said in February, we just knew that he was going to be on our side. But when March came and we went back to court, BAM! The judge said that Exxon was in compliance and they could continue operations.

But guess what! This judge ran for a new judgeship two and a half weeks later. There was a special television show on *60 Minutes* that interviewed some people and they talked about how judges are elected. When you're being elected you have to have funding to run and this is what happened in that case.

And so we're still fighting Exxon Paloffa plant. One reason is that Exxon refinery gave them pollution points which they call banking credits—but they did not have any credits to give. Therefore it was unlawful what they have done to us.

We are also fighting Dell Tech. It's adjacent to the Paloffa plant, near Exxon. We don't want them to expand and we prayed that they would not give them the permit to operate the facility. We should not have any more pollution in our community. Alsen just can't take any more.



*"All the smoke and fire can kill
people and I don't like that 'cause
it's not good to kill people."*

—Raven

Norco, Louisiana

Community and Justice

The town of Norco, Louisiana, is located along the Mississippi River, forty miles northwest of New Orleans. It is in the middle of "Cancer Alley," a swath of land along the river, which is home to 27 petrochemical and oil refineries. This town used to be called Sellers before it was renamed Norco, an acronym for Shell's New Orleans Refinery Company. The residents here are now trapped between Shell Oil Refinery on the east, and Shell Chemical Company on the west. Shell presently owns more than half the land in Norco.

The Diamond community is a small African American neighborhood on the west side of town, composed of Washington, Cathy, Diamond, and East streets. Washington Street is only three meters away from the Shell Chemical plant fence line. The air in this four-street neighborhood is highly polluted. It is contaminated daily with bad odors from carcinogens and toxic substances emitted by Shell Chemical's flares and exhaust pipes.

Health surveys have shown that nearly everyone in the community has health problems caused by industrial pollution. Many residents suffer from cancer, and cardiovascular diseases, liver, blood, and kidney problems. There are too many premature deaths in Norco.

The Diamond community has evolved from an extremely rich historical past. Many residents are the descendants of slaves, sharecroppers, and farmers who once worked the 460 acres on which the Shell refinery presently stands. This land had been the Trepagnier Plantation, and later



the Diamond Plantation. One of the largest slave rebellions in the South took place on the Trepagnier Plantation. The oldest Diamond community members can trace their heritage back to their families' first arrival here, as slaves.

This history has been ignored, disrespected, and distorted by Shell's presence. Since Shell entered the area in 1926, more and more of this important and historical land has been bought by the corporation for industrial expansion.

Shell Oil Refinery has had many accidents in Norco. In 1988 an explosion collapsed houses, killing residents inside, and affecting people up to sixty miles away with health problems. In 1994, an acid spill at the refinery caused property and health damages. On May 10, 1998, a lime truck exploded inside the Shell Chemical plant, spilling toxic lime into the community. Yet another

accident on December 8, 1998, resulted in methyl ethyl ketone and other harmful substances spilling into the Diamond community from the Shell Chemical Plant.

Apart from numerous accidents, daily there are foul odors, loud noises, and unsightly flares that constantly emit fumes and sometimes smoke. The Norco citizens are greatly disturbed by the inconvenience of noisy operations and the endless traffic of huge trucks. As a result, they want to move out of their town to places with better and safer environmental conditions. They want environmental justice.

Shell Chemical Company is responding to community outrage by offering a buy-out program to those interested in moving. Although Shell is offering the deal only to the two streets closest to the plant, the neighborhood is working to relocate the residents of all four of Diamond's streets. Residents are concerned they might have to sell their homes to Shell at a loss, since they are desperate for relocation and the chemical company has not been willing to pay an adjusted fair market value. After much negotiation, the most recent buy-out offer promises debt-free relocation, meaning a family would be able to move into a comparable home without the worries of a new mortgage or huge loans.

Despite fair financial compensation, however, those who choose to relocate can never be fully compensated for the break-up of their friendships, their families, and their neighborhood—the loss of their community.

MABEL EUGENE

The Smell of Fresh Air

We used to live where Shell is, on the old Diamond Plantation. Growing up, this way there was nothing there but grass. I was the first one on this street. We used to play ball and jump rope. We used to go to the river to swim.

I am 81 now. I guess I was in my thirties when we moved here to Norco. That was 51 years ago. Our land cost \$250, cheap. We was payin' \$10 a month till we had it out. Believe it or not, when we was stayin' over in those plantation houses we was payin' 50 cents a month. And sometimes we didn't have 50 cents. Our landlord balanced it on the books. He was a good landlord. As they was tearing down the old houses on the plantation, we took the lumber to make our houses over here.

I used to do housework for people. I also used to make canteens for the soldiers back in 1942 in Metarie. Then I worked in a restaurant. My husband, he used to work at General America in Good Hope. He used to clean train cars out. He later became a skilled machine operator.

When they first built it, Shell was a little small plant, but they expanded it. If anything happens, we don't have but two streets to get out of here. There've been two explosions recently. The last one, it was at 3 o'clock in the morning. It was Shell Oil that blew up. I was sleepin' and it woke me up. We got up and went up to Munz. The first explosion was right up the street here. The little boy outside mowin' the grass, he died right away. The lady got burnt real bad. She died.

Shell paid her son off. People say



it wasn't nothin' much for her life. Shell said everything was clear, go back into your house. Said it was an explosion. Never said anything else.

I raised five grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren in this house. My oldest daughter died at 42 of sarcoidosis, a lung problem. It came on suddenly. The doctor asked her if she lived by a plant. She said yes, she was stayin' here with me. Her babies were 10, 12, and 15 when she died. Since then some more people here got that lung problem too.

I have asthma. I used to have it as a little girl. Now it started up again. Look at my little grandson. He's got it bad.

I want the smell of fresh air. I used to sit out front every evening. I hope to meet up with some nice neighbors when I move. And I'd like a special bathroom for the handicap. I'll miss that noise from the plant too, and I know what else I'm going to miss—that church, right over there.

CLARA SMITH

Take the Good with the Bad

I am 96 years of age. I was brought here when I was real small. My house was over there by Shell. I was brought here real small. This was a field. Used to raise cotton, corn, different things. My parents worked the field. When Shell bought it, we had to move. They just gave you a notice to move. Shell didn't give us nothin'. People had to build tents, just something to live in until you built a house. A lot of people moved away.

I've been in this house 48 years. Not every day is good, not every day is bad. So you take the good with the bad. Things have changed up until now from when I was young. Used to be plenty of fishing around here, but since that oil and stuff got around there's not so much anymore. When I was young we didn't have automobiles, didn't have airplanes; nothing like that. Kids had wagons. We used to walk along the levee. We'd walk along the tracks to watch the trains. My favorite thing is going to church, but sometimes now I can't even go to church.

Before Shell came I really liked it here, but now it's so dangerous. About a month ago lightning struck that plant over there. Shell had an explosion. I was in bed. It came up like a windstorm and it knocked me out of bed. Nobody could come in or go out of the neighborhood for a day. What could you do but take it?

Now sometimes you're scared to sleep. In your sleep you wake up and hear all kinds of noise. Sometimes a smell comes and upsets my stomach. I've been here so long I'm used to it. Sometimes the noise be so loud I have to close the door and lock the house



up. It's just like a prison. That's the way it is. We're trapped between two plants. We can't move either way. I don't feel good about it, but what am I going to do? I just have to go and take it.

I don't know what kind of neighbors they are. They stay over there and I stay over here. I just see 'em at a distance. They don't talk to me and I don't talk to them. You can't move them and we can't move. So each other, we just got to stay and take it. I'm not enjoying it, but what am I going to do? I don't see nothin' else to do but stay here.

I never would have built my house here if Shell was already here. If they don't force me to move, I'll stay here. If they force me to move, I'll go into an old folks' home. I'm not going to try to get another house. If I sell to Shell they won't pay me enough money to buy another house like this. This is not a special place, but it's mine and I'm staying here.

The future generation? They'll have to live with it all. I'd like to see them live somewhere where it is comfortable. I've been through good and bad, so now I don't worry. When it's good I take it, when it's bad I take it. All I know is, I wake up and see a new day, and I just do the best I can until the next day.

MARGIE RICHARD

A Spiritual Call

My call to stand up for environmental justice is a spiritual call. I know God called me to share my experiences because of my sister's death. She was my closest friend. She died from sarcoidosis. We were one year, eleven months apart. Over ten years I watched her die before my eyes.

She was such a giving person, a servant to the public elementary schools. She went beyond the call of duty to help a child learn. She taught elementary school for 29 years.

We had a happy childhood growing up in Belltown. Church revival was the most fun. It would last for seven days. After revival there was a baptism. Everybody would dress in white and march to the Mississippi River. There were snakes in the river. The preachers would stand and preach in the water. We would sing songs like "Take Me to the Water." After you went down emerged in the water, there was a "Hallelujah" and we would sing .

In this environmental struggle, I saw the principles of my dad and mom manifest in me. When I thought about environmental injustice I knew I had to do something, not just think about my sister and her injustice. So I was determined to let government know we need to fill the gap between industrial facilities, government, and common people. If we could ever fill that gap, it would be to communicate—meaning listening and speaking. That's my philosophy: what good is knowledge if we don't share it? My inner voice said, "If you don't tell them, how will they know?" So I had the opportunity to speak to many groups. I speak honest, just, and fair.

I'm a dreamer, and every one of my dreams has come true. The world is still good. God created races, not

racism. If you took the first layer of skin off all of us, you wouldn't be able to tell who's who. People often know people for who others say they are, not for who they really are. It's so easy to love, but difficult to hate. That's where our problems come from.

The bottom line is people need people. We all need each other. And with that desire and inner spirit God allowed me to be on the boards of National Advisory Council for Environmental Policies and Technology, the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Concerned Citizens of Norco, the Mississippi River Basin Alliance, and the Christian Women World Wide Outreach. My dreams are no longer dreams; they are ambitions being fulfilled.

In all of this, it's win-win. Those who live by industrial facilities should have a voice. They should have had one long ago. But we are now communicating. It is not just one-sided communication. Shell agreed to a Pilot Community Communication Program and to cut down toxic emissions over the next five years. They also agreed to put in constant ambient air monitors in the community. They agreed to help with upward mobility in education, health care, and community projects. They're going to deal with our neighborhood leaders. We need to communicate that we disagree; and agree to improve.

Every struggle has to have an end. But the end is not an ordinary end. It is the beginning of true progress. No matter where I am, I will always work with Norco. It is my heartbeat. My philosophy is—as long as we're alive there is hope. Don't give up. God is still in control. To God be the Glory!

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Environmental Science/Studies Committee

The Principles of Environmental Justice

1. **Environmental justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. **Environmental justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. **Environmental justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced, and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. **Environmental justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons, and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water and food.
5. **Environmental justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. **Environmental justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. **Environmental justice** demands that right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.
8. **Environmental justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. **Environmental justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. **Environmental justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations convention on genocide.
11. **Environmental justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of native peoples to the U. S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. **Environmental justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. **Environmental justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. **Environmental justice** opposes the destructive operations of multinational corporations.
15. **Environmental justice** opposes military occupation, repression, and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. **Environmental justice** calls for the education of present and future generations, which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. **Environmental justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Adopted by the delegates to the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit Conference, Washington, D.C., October 27, 1991

Community Service, Inc.

was founded in 1940 by educator and engineer Arthur Morgan to help people improve the quality of small community life. It is a nonprofit, international membership organization.

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